

Module 3: Instruction~ Indicator 6

Subject: Writing

Goal: I will learn about monitoring student learning and making timely decisions regarding differentiation during writing instruction so that my student's will remain engaged in rigorous and relevant learning tasks that deepen their procedural knowledge of writing and enhance their ability to demonstrate the acquisition of new knowledge through written expression.

Summary: Based on my self-evaluation of the CCT indicators for this module, I have determined that I tend to monitor my students' learning according to task completion and engagement rather than using specific data relative to the progress of individuals and groups of students. I also tend to adjust my instruction in response to pacing and procedures instead of making timely decisions about whether differentiation of instruction is needed for the whole group, small groups or individual students. After a mini-lesson in writing, I generally find myself focusing on the students who are not completing the task rather than addressing students' specific academic needs. For example, while students were working on drafting a personal narrative, I focused my attention primarily on the five students who were not completing the tasks in a timely manner. I met with these students to guide them through the planning and drafting phases of the writing process so they could complete their stories in the same timeframe as their classmates. Students who appeared to be completing the writing assignment at an efficient pace were left with less guidance and I forfeited many opportunities to enhance their performance. By making instructional adjustments based on pacing and procedures, my mini-lessons and individual conferences with students are less meaningful and effective than I desire

Reflection Paper

It is imperative for beginning teachers to reflect and self assess the efficacy of lessons. These reflections are always done after the lesson, leaving me with many moments where I wish I could just go back and make some small adjustments while I was teaching to make my instruction more effective and have a greater impact on student learning. When reviewing the indicators for Module three, I shared these thoughts with my mentor and she guided my attention to indicator six. Indicator six focuses on monitoring my students' learning and adjusting my teaching during instruction. I used the CCT Performance Profile as a tool to reflect on my current teaching and set goals for enhancing my instruction.

When reflecting on my current teaching I found that I was generally monitoring student learning relative to task completion. Instead of focusing my instructional adjustments primarily on pacing and procedures, I recognize that I need to make more timely decisions about whether to differentiate my lessons for the whole group, small group, or individual students. Student's individual academic needs should be addressed using a variety of teaching strategies and materials to challenge their thinking and keep them engaged in the learning. I decided I wanted to focus on my instruction during the writing block because I

felt this was a subject in which differentiated my instruction in response to the students performance was highly required. By targeting my writing instruction, my goal is to keep my students engaged in learning tasks that will deepen their procedural knowledge of writing and improve their performance during the writing block.

When beginning my study, my mentor recommended a book titled, **Transformative Assessment**, by James Popham. A lot of my learning came from this resource because it answered many of my questions regarding instructional adjustments. Popham defined instruction as the best available information which should "flow from a determination about what students know and can do based on evidence." Chapter three in Popham's book focused on collecting the evidence and making instructional adjustments. Popham discussed what he referred to as "on-the-spot" adjustments. This is the type of adjustment when a teacher makes an inference that a change in instruction will benefit the students' learning. These types of simple adjustments are ones that I often reflected on after my lesson and I identified aspects of instruction that may be causing misconceptions and confusion for my students during the lesson.

As I began to focus on adjustments during my mini-lessons, I developed a sense of when I had to make a timely decision based on whether my students were able to answer questions, follow directions, or complete a task. An example of when this instructional strategy was effective in my classroom is when I was modeling how to use an "OREO" graphic organizer to plan a persuasive writing piece. While modeling this skill to the students, I stopped and to assess their understanding. Their response showed that 70% of my class did not understand the meaning for each letter in the word "OREO ". With this response from my students, I differentiated my instruction for the whole class by returning to the explanation of the "OREO" and composing a better explanation for the students. The students were then able to explain that in a persuasive paragraph, the "O" represents stating your opinion, the "R" represents your reason for that opinion, the "E" represents an example of your opinion, and the last "O" represents restating your opinion. By going back and making this "on-the-spot" adjustment during my teaching I improved the effectiveness of my instruction and most importantly, improved students' learning by deepening their understanding of the skill being taught. The students were then able to use this graphic organizer as a valuable tool to plan their persuasive writing piece for their Earth Day writing project.

The next resource I used to expand my new learning was chapter ten in **Classroom Instruction that Works, 2nd Edition**. This chapter discussed the importance of identifying the learning objectives of your lesson first. My school requires that lesson plans are submitted weekly so I am constantly setting the objectives for my lessons but I after reading this part of the chapter, while writing my lesson plans, I began asking myself "What should my student know, understand, and be able to do independently by the end of this unit or lesson?" This helped me make my goals more authentic and specific to the learning task that is being taught. This helped me monitor my students learning because I knew exactly what I wanted my students to understand that day and what I needed to assess and adjust if the students' performance was not demonstrating progression. Setting these goals during writing instruction was always something I did for the whole class. I found it difficult during the writing block to monitor my students learning because I have five specific students who were always slower in the writing process and in my eyes, needed more of my attention and instruction to be successful in their writing. This resource suggested setting a specific and personalized goal for each student. By setting this goal, I can monitor progress and determine whether I need to differentiate my instruction for the whole group, small group, or individual students.

For advice about how to monitor my students' learning during writing instruction, I went to an experienced third grade teacher about how she organized her writing block. She suggested making a schedule where I meet with 4-5 students a day to conference and set goals. By setting a schedule, students will know when they are meeting with the teacher and can prepare the work they need to have for their next meeting. The next resource I used was a website called "Busy Teachers Café." This website provides great resources for teachers to use across all different curriculums. I was specifically looking for a way to organize my writing conferencing. I was quickly able to find a Writer's Conference sheet that was exactly what I had envisioned. This sheet simply had a box for each child, inside stating the child's name, focus of conference, and task they are working on. Along with this conference sheet, I felt it would be extremely beneficial for the students to walk away with a similar piece of paper that states the date of the conference, the focus, and the goal that they are working on when they go back to their writing seat. By creating this goal sheet for the student, my personal goal is that the students will return to their seat on task and they can refer to this goal sheet when they need to remember what to work on next. With all of this in place, it was time for me to just try it out!

When first starting the conferences, I noticed a huge difference in my own personal ability to stay on task and truly monitor where the students were based on the work they brought to the table. The conference sheet provided a perfect place to take anecdotal notes on my conference with the student because I was able to write down what we mostly talked about and what we set our goal to be for the next time we meet. When filling out the goal sheet with the students, I had them tell me what they needed to work on. This really showed me what they gained from our conference and whether or not they had a clear understanding of what their next personalized objective was to be completed by our next meeting. I immediately started seeing an impact on the students' performance when they left my conference because they were engaged in the task and knew what they had to do. For example, after meeting with one of my students, we set a goal for him to finish planning his writing by Friday. Knowing that he had one day to complete this work, he returned to his desk with a motivated posture and pencil and finished planning his writing by the end of that writing block.

After my first full week of conferences I sat down and looked at my anecdotal notes and the students' work. I was able to meet with all of my students that week and set a goal with them. I then began to see the positive impacts on my students' learning when looking at the progress in their opinion writing piece. For example, I set a goal with one student at the beginning of week to write two examples why littering is "making the earth sick" to support his opinion. This student is one who I originally felt I had to work with everyday in order to get anything complete. When I looked at this student's work that day, he had completed the two examples, along with rest of the paragraph. I was so excited to meet with him the next week and celebrate this writing piece.

After analyzing the students' work, I looked through my TEAM resources and found the CCT Performance Profile. I felt extremely successful in that moment because I realized that I had no longer based my instruction on pacing and task completion that week. I based my instruction on what my individual students needed according to the specific work they brought to the conferences. I then began to look at my anecdotal notes and review the individual focuses or tasks addressed during our conferences. One common task that more than half of my students needed additional support with was organizing their writing and using paragraphs. I decided I would give a whole group mini-lesson on the structure of a paragraph and using transition sentences. After giving this mini-lesson, I noticed an increase in the number of students using transition words and sentences in their writing and

many of my students were forming paragraphs to organize their ideas. As evidenced by student work samples, I found it extremely time efficient and effective to teach this as a whole class lesson.

As I continued to see the benefits of monitoring my students learning and adjusting my teaching based on my students' needs, I began to research a strategy called guided writing. Guided writing lessons are small-group lessons in which you are teaching strategies that a particular group of students need to practice with immediate guidance and feedback from the teacher. A website titled "Read, Write, Think" provided a professional development strategy guide that outlined this research basis strategy and ideas on how to implement these small groups. When beginning to form these small groups it was important for me to remember that these are flexible groups and I must still keep up with my individual conferences to keep my other students on track with their goals. When teaching a guided writing lesson, I grouped my students by using my writing conference anecdotal notes. I found common areas where students were struggling and where students needed to push themselves to reach their highest potential. One group's focus in a guided writing lesson was to add more descriptive words in their writing piece. This guided writing lesson was about 15 minutes long and was based on what the students' current needs were. I began the lesson by explaining what the purpose of our writing group was by discussing interesting word choice options providing examples of how authors use this strategy in their writing. Our group then brainstormed a list of descriptive words that would make their own writing "come to life" or paint a picture in the readers mind. The students had time to write independently in our small group and I was able to monitor the students while they were writing and prompt or guide their thinking as needed. Before the guided writing time is over I allow time for each writer to briefly share something they have written with their peers. This allows the students to experience their newly written text as a whole and receive feedback from their peers.

Guided writing groups and individual conferences are integrated into my writing block now as an effective tool to monitor my students' learning and enhance their performance and engagement in the learning task. When reviewing the students work, I observed an increase in the quality of the work and devotion to task completion. As I conferred with one student, my goal was to provide the student with extra support on planning his writing. Although I spent a whole group mini-lesson on the planning process, I also worked with this student one-on-one and differentiated my instruction by using a graphic organizer that provided sentence starters and a more structured format. After guiding this student through the planning process and monitoring his progression throughout the unit of study, he successfully used his planning map to write an opinion piece that provided a strong point of view with reasons and examples. After meeting with this student and seeing the positive affect this teaching strategy had on his writing, I then planned a guided writing group with four other students to work on planning their writing and deepening their understanding of this step in the writing process. By teaching this group of student's different ways to record their ideas before they write, they began to view the planning process as a useful tool to brainstorm their ideas. These students also benefited from this guided writing group because they became engaged in a rich conversation about what they wanted their opinion piece to state and their reasons for feeling this way.

I used the book **Writing Workshop, The Essential Guide** by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi as a resource when conducting the conferences with my students. In chapter five, Fletcher and Portalupi stress the point that you must remember to "teach the writer not the writing." I learned through my research and practice that I must work to improve written

communication skills that can be transferred to all forms of writing, not just one particular piece of written work.

After seeing such positive impacts on my teaching and my students' learning, I know my instruction is valuable and effective. By monitoring my students' learning through differentiated teaching, I have created a learning environment where my students are engaged in rigorous and personalized tasks. Overall I have seen a great impact on my students learning regarding their performance and success in the task. I want to continue to see growth with four of my students. I plan to work with these students in individual conferences and group them in guided writing sessions where targeted writing strategies can be taught in a small group setting. I will continue to use these strategies in my writing instruction and continuously collect evidence and adjust my instruction based on the performance and engagement of my students.

I have also been more mindful of using specific data relative to the progress of individuals and groups of students. I incorporate many forms of quick check-in assessments throughout the day to monitor my students' learning and make timely decisions about whether differentiation of instruction is needed. I intend to continue to use the Common Core State Standards when planning units of study across the curriculum. As a result of my new learning, I am varying my instruction in all content areas and my students are demonstrating high levels of engagement and increased performance on all academic tasks.